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MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

IN view of the disposition of some of our leading colleges to increase the requirements of admission by adding a modern foreign language to the already disproportionate amount of language work demanded (the dignity and importance of English having finally been established), in comparison with mathematics, science and history, we sent the following circular to a large number of colleges, east and west and south, to ascertain, if possible, a consensus of opinion on the relative amount of modern language teaching which is to be expected of our secondary schools as a preparation for college :

March 30, 1896.

MY DEAR SIR :—Along the line of and in the interest of uniformity of requirements for admission to our best colleges, I solicit replies to the following questions, as Chairman of the Committee appointed at Denver to study the problem.

(1) As a preparation for admission to the classical course (so-called) of those colleges which require *three* foreign languages, viz : Latin, Greek and French or German, would you consider in addition to four or more years of Latin, and three years of Greek, that *two* years (the last two in the course) of French or German, under a competent instructor with four or five recitation periods (forty-five to fifty minutes each) a week, sufficient to satisfy the demands of the best institutions ?

(2) In a preparatory course which omits Greek, and substitutes a modern language therefor, would you consider *three* years of French or German (the last three) with recitations as above, a sufficient substitute for the Greek, time for time.

(3) Do you think the preparatory requirements for *any* course in college, should include Latin and Greek and French and German (four foreign languages) ?

(4) Do you think where Greek is omitted in the preparatory course that both French and German rather than a choice of one of them, should be required in addition to Latin ? If so, and you desire to give the time (three years) which would otherwise be given to Greek, how would you divide the time between German and French, since it would be inconvenient to begin either in the middle of the year ? In other words, would it not be better to

spend *three* years on *one* of these languages, rather than two years on one of them, and *one* year (the last) on the other?

(5) Do you commend any preparatory course, which omits both Latin and Greek, and substitutes therefor French and German? If so, in which would you advise the greater proficiency, remembering that in most public high schools, German is more studied than French?

(6) Do you think it material that the *readings* in the French or the German should be uniform, provided the quality is satisfactory?

(7) Do you demand a specific amount and specific books, without accepting equivalents? If so, how should we prepare pupils in our public high schools, who are to enter different colleges, which insist on different readings, since these pupils must recite in the same class? It does not seem possible unless equivalents in quantity and quality are allowed. If your requirements are explicit, please send them.

(8) What ratio of conversational to literary work would you advise or do you require?

(9) What grammar or grammars are the best for preparatory schools? Would you advise one written in the original before college work begins?

A reply to these questions at such length, and with such information and counsel as you may be willing to give, will be received with much appreciation.

Yours truly,

A. F. NIGHTINGALE,

Chairman of Committee on College
Entrance Requirements.

Replies came promptly from thirty-eight institutions, and from others too late for classification. All except Harvard University (see President Eliot's letter) reply to the first question in the affirmative, viz: that two years devoted to French or German (the last two) in a four years' course, beside four years of Latin and three of Greek are sufficient.

Of the sixty colleges whose requirements are given, fifteen only require a third foreign language for admission to the A. B. course. These are Harvard, Yale, Vassar, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Leland Stanford, Oberlin, Columbia, Brown, University of Colorado, College of New Jersey, Tufts, Evelyn, Rutgers, Barnard.

Several of the colleges do not require either French or German as a third language, but will give credit for it, and the larger number do not ask for either. If the colleges could enter into

the spirit of our public secondary schools, and fully appreciate that they are the schools of the people, and therefore primarily finishing schools (the term is unfortunate), that drawing, music and physical culture must have a fair place, that the claims of elementary science must be heeded, and that many cannot enter college, however intense their desire, and that a much larger number come to a decision late in the course, they would, I am certain, conclude that a modern language should be accepted in place of Greek, or that science should be accepted in addition to Latin and Greek, in lieu of a modern language. If a pupil devotes four periods a day, five days a week and forty weeks a year to class-room recitation, he would have 3200 periods in four years. Of these 760 at least should be devoted to Latin, 600 to Greek, 560 to English, 400 to mathematics, not including solid geometry, 200 to history; and if 400 must be given to a modern language, it would make 2920 periods which leaves 280 periods. No provision is here made for drawing which ought to have two periods a week for four years, nor music, which should have at least one period a week, nor physical culture, which, in our large cities, requires one period a week, which makes 640 periods or 360 periods more than the time allows, and not a single period given to any science whatever. It seems therefore mathematically demonstrated that if three languages are to be required in addition to English for admission to the A. B. course, we must forever forbid any elementary science to a pupil in the classical course so-called, or deprive him of the benefits accruing from a study of drawing, vocal music and systematic physical culture. In the name of our public high schools, therefore, we protest against the requirement of a *third* foreign language, to the exclusion of elementary science.

To the second question that three years of German or French be accepted for the same amount of time devoted to Greek, nearly all answer yes, provided the substitution of a modern language for Greek should be allowed at all; many insist that no amount of French or German can be considered as an equivalent for Greek as a disciplinary study; some think a modern

language preferable. Yale will not allow such a substitute for admission at all.

The University of North Carolina and the Columbian University write that four years should be given to French or German, if presented as a substitute for Greek.

To the third question the universal answer is that four foreign languages should not be required, although Harvard and one or two others think they should be accepted (see President Eliot's letter).

For the fourth question, a large majority of the colleges think three years devoted to one modern language better than two to one, and one to the other, although Lehigh, Lake Forest, Columbian, Amherst, Johns Hopkins, Oberlin, Wells, University of Pennsylvania, University of Minnesota, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina and University of Indiana prefer a division of time between both French and German, rather than to give the whole time to one. A majority prefer two years of German and one of French, although a few prefer two years of French and one of German.

To the fifth question, whether French or German should be accepted for Latin and Greek for admission to any course, Harvard, Leland Stanford, Brown, Cornell, University of California, University of Michigan, University of Indiana and University of Texas say yes. Although most of these deprecate the necessity of admitting students without a knowledge of Latin, and allow it only in courses looking toward the B.S. degree, Leland Stanford University seems to prefer the modern languages to the ancient (see President Jordan's letter).

To the sixth and seventh questions, all the colleges reply that proper equivalents will be accepted, and that no specific amount of reading or specific books will be insisted upon, and that quality rather than quantity should be the main thought in the instruction.

To the eighth question, a very large majority of the colleges reply that conversation in the original language should be only incidental, and that no specific time or labor should be devoted

to it in a preparatory course. The literary, rather than the conversational aspect should be cultivated. Wellesley says, devote one-third of the time to conversation; Wells and the University of Illinois say, one-half of the time; Columbian University says, one-fourth; and Oberlin, one-fifth.

Concerning the ninth question, the colleges think a grammar in the original language not desirable, although the University of Illinois recommends one, also Wells College; and Wellesley says, *review* the language by use of a grammar in the original. It will be seen that many of the colleges allow French and German in place of Latin and Greek for the B. S. course and either for Greek in the Ph. B. course. A careful study of the requirements, however, will show many differences and many incongruities, and indicate a necessity for a better understanding, and a rearrangement of requirements, before our secondary schools will be able to shape their courses in harmony with the colleges and to the satisfaction of the people. To show the trend of thought in certain localities, and the difference of opinion among some of our most distinguished educators, I append a few of the letters received in reply to my inquiries.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
Cambridge, April 4th, 1896.

MY DEAR SIR:—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your inquiries dated March 30th.

I answer the questions in the order of your letter.

1. I do not consider two years of French or German at the rate of "four or five periods a week" sufficient for either of these languages. Moreover, in my judgment they should not be left to the last two years of a four years' course. One of the modern languages should certainly be attacked in the second year of the course, even when Latin and Greek are both to be studied.

2. In a preparatory course which substitutes French or German for Greek, a modern language should, in my judgment, have just as much time as the Greek would have had.

3. I do not think that a college should *require* Latin, Greek, French, and German for admission; but it should *permit* all four languages to be presented and counted for admission. This is what Harvard College does, and two-fifths of the candidates present all four languages (in 1895, 227 out of 553).

4. As a substitute for Greek, I should prefer one modern language to two modern languages, provided that no more time could be given to the modern language or languages than was given to the Greek.

5. I certainly commend preparatory courses which omit both Latin and Greek and substitute therefor French and German, or one of these two languages. On this subject I beg to refer you to the programme prepared by the Committee of Ten under the title of "Modern languages" and to that under the title "English." Your remark about German in public high schools is correct in the West; but in the East, French is more studied than German.

6. If the College and Scientific School examinations are on quantities, of course it is important that the books read in French or in German should be uniform, otherwise the schools are put to great inconvenience; but at Harvard College we prefer translation at sight as a test of power over a language. Our requirements in the elements of Greek, Latin, German, and French are covered by the single phrase "The translation at sight of simple prose." In the more advanced requirements we require the translation at sight of average passages from Homer, or from Cicero and Virgil, or from modern German prose, or from standard French prose, and the translation from English into the foreign language of a passage similarly described.

7. We do not demand a specific amount of specific books. I send you a pamphlet which states our requirements for admission.

8. We do not expect candidates for admission to speak foreign languages, or to understand them when spoken. Our admission examinations are altogether in writing.

9. We neither require nor recommend any particular grammar or grammars. We should not advise grammars written in the languages to be studied.

Very truly yours,

CHARLES W. ELIOT

To Mr. A. F. Nightingale.

YALE COLLEGE,

April 3, 1896.

MY DEAR SIR:—President Dwight refers your inquires of March 30th to me as the Chairman of our Committee on Entrance Examinations. I have the honor to state that:

(1) We regard two years' study of French or German under the conditions which you name, satisfactory and sufficient.

(2) and (3) We have no course for students who have not studied Greek, and we do not require both French and German in addition to Latin and Greek.

(5) For ourselves, we commend no preparatory course which omits *either* Latin or Greek, and still less one which omits both.

(6) Our modern language instructors do not think it material that the readings in French or German should be *uniform*.

(7) We accept *equivalents*.

(8) Our requirements in French and German look rather to the use of the language as a tool in study than to its convenience in travel and business. We lay little stress on *conversational* work.

(9) We recommend no special grammar or grammars.

I am, very respectfully yours,

THOMAS DAY SEYMOUR

To A. F. Nightingale, Esq.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY,
Palo Alto, April 7.

Dr. A. F. Nightingale :

DEAR SIR :—Our requirements for entrance differ from those of other institutions in (1): We accept no work of such a character that we cannot build upon it. (2) We exact a high minimum of amount, allowing each school to determine for itself what the subjects taught shall be. (3) We allow any equivalence or substitution, as the question of what is taken in preparatory work for students who go on to college is a matter of minor importance. The essential is in the thoroughness of the work. For example, we accept no science work not done in a laboratory for a year.

The classical preparatory courses are favored only as schools find them the *easiest* and *cheapest* line of preparation. Their evil is their lack of adaptation to the needs of many of the best students.

1. There are few students who are not injured by so large a percentage of language studies. They lose their sense of reality and regard memory work as study. Yes.

2. German or French equally thoroughly taught, I regard as fully as useful in training as the same strength given to Greek. Yes.

3. No, not for most students; men trained on grammar and words alone are often spoiled for other forms of scholarship and for general effectiveness.

4. Better three years on one as a rule; depends on the student.

5. Certainly; no more reason for insisting that *all* should take Latin, than for insisting on German or chemistry. The majority of college students lose by taking four years of Latin.

As matters go, the German should have precedence.

6. Certainly, *not*.

7. *No*; no special advantage in one book over some other.

8. Would leave it to the teachers; no special advice or requirement.

9. "Grammar was dead to begin with," and our preparatory schools

spend proportionately too much time and strength on it. Depends on teacher's aim and methods.

I send register.

DAVID S. JORDAN

CORNELL UNIVERSITY,
Ithaca, N. Y., April 3, 1896.

DEAR SIR :—The whole field of the questions in your circular letter of March 30 is so confused and unsettled that any answers must necessarily be unsatisfactory. I append, however, such answers as we can give.

1. Cornell University does not require three foreign languages as a preparation for admission to any course.

2. We do consider three years (preparatory school time) of French and German fairly equivalent to entrance Greek or entrance Latin. That is we require as a substitute for the Greek or the Latin two (University) years of French and German, which in an average school means not less than three years.

3. Cornell University does not require more than two languages for entrance to any course.

4. The practice of this University is to require the substitution of one language for one language. A student may, on entering, in addition to his other required qualifications, offer Greek and Latin, Greek and French or German, Latin and French or German, or French and German, according to the course he enters. This indicates that in actual practice we prefer three years on one language to three years divided between two languages.

5. We permit, as has already been stated, the substitution of French and German and the higher mathematics for both Latin and Greek, as qualification for entrance to the course in science. We require an equal proficiency, that is we require two (University) years of French and two of German.

6. This question may mean one of two things : (1) Should all colleges and universities unite on a uniform requirement? To this we say yes, decidedly, so far as it can be done, in the interest of the schools. (2) It may mean, should a given institution require a strict adherence to a prescribed text? To this again in the interest of the schools, no. For our present requirements, and the latitude allowed in choice of readings, grammars, etc., see pages 30–37 of the copy of the Cornell University Register sent with this letter. In this connection attention must be called to the conference between delegates of Cornell, Columbia, Harvard, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale, which has this winter been endeavoring so far as possible to arrange for uniformity in the texts, grammars, etc. prescribed by these institutions. The report of this conference has not yet been made, but will probably modify somewhat our requirements as found on pages of the Register referred to.

7. The answer to this question is included in the answer to 6.

8. For French and German, see pages 33-34 of the Register. For Greek and Latin see page 33.

9. As will be seen on pages 33-34, Cornell University, while mentioning various grammars, does not prescribe any of them.

Yours very truly,

J. G. SCHURMAN

To Mr. A. F. Nightingale,
Board of Education,
Chicago, Ill.

AMHERST COLLEGE,
Amherst, Mass., April 7, 1896.

Mr. A. F. Nightingale.

MY DEAR SIR :— In reply to your letter of March 30th making inquiries with reference to uniform requirements for admission to our best colleges, let me answer briefly the questions put by you in the order in which you asked them.

1. Yes.

2. In reply to this question let me say that I do not look at the French and German offered in preparation for college as a "sufficient substitute for Greek." I regard it as having a very distinct value of its own, and I think that the three years indicated in your question is as much time as ought to be required by way of preparatory work in either French or German. The training secured by the three years' study of Greek, however, has a distinctly different and in my own opinion, a higher value.

3. I do not.

4. If there is any attempt to make the courses at our colleges uniform I do not think it wise to require three languages beside English in preparation. I should prefer a requirement of Latin and French, or Latin and German, or French and German. But if both French and German are required with Latin, I should advise spending two years in the study of German and one year in the study of French.

5. The value of thorough preparatory work in Latin is so great, whatever the line of study which the student is to pursue later, that I strongly recommend Latin in the preparatory course. If French and German are offered for preparation and no Latin, I would recommend as nearly as possible an equal period of time for the study of each.

6. I do not.

7. I believe in a fair allowance of equivalents. If the preparatory work done is reasonably good, a mechanical insistence upon exact portions of specified books is absurd.

8. Where French and German are pursued in a course which is preparatory to a liberalizing course of college study, there should be thorough

and systematic study of the laws and forms of grammar from the beginning. I believe thoroughly in the value of *conversational methods as an aid and a stimulus* in such work. But the finest results in literary training as a rule will be found to follow the most careful and thorough training in the principles and laws of grammar. Fluent conversation by immature students does not tend to accuracy of knowledge, precision of style, or force and clearness of thought.

9. Except in the hands of a "natural teacher," it is best for American students not to attempt French from a French grammar or German from a German grammar in preparatory work. I will not attempt to specify particular text-books.

With esteem, I am,

Yours very truly,

MERRILL E. GATES

These letters and others similar, read between the lines, show that the irrepressible conflict between the classics and science is still being waged, greatly to the demoralization of our public high schools, and that we are in danger of so continuing this folly that our secondary schools cannot become an integral part of our American system of education from the kindergarten to the postgraduate university. The fiat has gone forth that elementary science will and must become an important factor in all our public high schools; biology, physics, chemistry, by laboratory methods and under skilled teachers, are becoming year by year more and more popular, practical, beneficial and disciplinary, and it is absolutely necessary for the colleges to recognize this feature of secondary education. Greek must yield to modern languages, or modern languages to science, or Greek to science, in order that the curricula of our secondary schools and the college requirements of admission to the A. B. course may accommodate themselves each to the other.

A. F. NIGHTINGALE